

The University of Chicago

THE THEOLOGICAL TECHNIQUE OF
A MEDIATING THEOLOGIAN—
HORACE BUSHNELL

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
AND ETHICS

1933

By
HAROLD RICKEL HEININGER

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CHAPTER FOUR

AN EVALUATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL TECHNIQUE OF HORACE BUSHNELL

Our study has shown that Horace Bushnell came into the ministry partially prepared for the rôle of mediator by attitudes molded in his youth; that he met a situation in his church at Hartford, Connecticut, which demanded a mediating agent; and that the contemporary theological situation in New England created a larger audience for his mediating ministry. We have investigated the characteristic method of this religious leader as it is revealed in his handling of various vital questions of his day. We have found this mediating method disclosed in his treatment of certain non-theological problems such as that of negro slavery in America, the custom of legalistic observances of fasts and sabbaths in New England religious practice, the dependence of the churches upon revivals and revivalism as the accepted means of expansion and propagation of the Christian faith, and the omnipresent denominationalism in this land of "freedom" to worship according to the dictates of conscience or custom.

An inductive study of his major theological works, his published sermons, his letters, addresses and articles has shown his method in dealing with specific theological problems which were critical in his day. Our analysis has uncovered the answers to the questions, "What is the mediator's view of human nature?" "What is his interpretation of the Christian's idea of God?" "What discoveries does he make at the Cross of Christ?" and "How does he relate religion to science?"

In this concluding chapter let us summarize the findings which grow out of this study and give an evaluation of the theological technique of Horace Bushnell.

a. The unifying principle of his mediating theology is the principle of "Comprehensiveness."

It was an axiomatic conviction which determined his reactions in the face of practical and theological problems that the truth is to be found not at the extremes, left or right, nor in the golden mean but in a solution which comprehends both extremes. However arrived at, this conviction found clear expression in an

article which appeared before his theological treatises were published.¹ This exposition of the idea indirectly acknowledges a debt to the French philosopher, M. Cousin, whose "eclectic spiritualism"² influenced Bushnell. It is perhaps permissible to imagine our theologian in a formative period reading from Linberg's translation of the Frenchman's Introduction to the History of Philosophy³ a characteristic passage such as this:

"Being hedged in by the necessity of either choosing between two opposite systems of which both are bad (i.e. the systems of Kant and of Locke) or of tormenting ourselves in vain to find a new system, which would never the less be either the one or the other of them more or less modified; we arrive, in extricating ourselves from this dilemma at the only possible solution which yet remains, and which consists in the combination of these contrary systems, by rejecting all the exclusive views which they contain, which can be done only by regarding them in a point of view which being more comprehensive than that of either the one or the other system, may be capable of including, and thus of explaining and completing them both. You may perceive the tendency of my discourse. After the subjective idealism of the school of Kant, and the empiricism and sensualism of that of Locke, have been developed and their last possible results exhausted, no new combination is in my opinion possible but the union of these two systems by centering them both in a vast and powerful eclecticism."⁴

Such a conception seems to have fallen in the mind of Bushnell like good seed upon fertile soil. The present day reader of this century old volume finds other sentences and paragraphs which remind him of the American thinker whose mediating ministry we have been tracing. A few examples follow.

"What is error? [asks Cousin.] It is one of the elements of thought, considered exclusively and mistaken for the whole of thought. Error is nothing but incomplete truth, converted into absolute truth. No other error is possible."⁵

¹Horace Bushnell, "Christian Comprehensiveness," New Englander, January, 1848. See Building Eras in Religion, Literary Varieties (Centenary ed., 1910; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), pp. 386 ff.

²R. B. Perry, Philosophy of the Recent Past (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 11.

³Published in Boston (1832) by Hillard, Gray, Little & Wilkins.

⁴Ibid., p. 413.

⁵Ibid., p. 195.

"We are therefore always in the possession of some truth; and almost always, when we reflect, we think something that is false; for we think of something that is incomplete; and although in everything that is incomplete there necessarily exists something that is true, yet that truth is always combined with something erroneous."¹

The concluding exhortation of the French philosopher to his students had an effect which was far reaching upon Bushnell and which in turn he, as a mediating theologian, passed on to his readers in America.

"I hope that those youths, who for some time will frequent this lecture room, will here contract different habits; that they will learn to understand that as every error contains some truth, therefore every error should be treated with profound indulgence; and that all those halves of men that we constantly meet with around us, are nevertheless fragments of humanity, and that in them we should still respect that truth and that humanity of which they participate.

"And do you know the means gentlemen, by which you may arrive at this tolerance, or rather at this universal sympathy? You can arrive at it on one condition only; and that is, that you embrace all the elements of thought and thus reconstruct the whole edifice of humanity in your own minds. When that is done, then whosoever of your fellow creatures may present himself to you, and whatsoever may be the exclusive idea that prepossesses him . . . you will sympathize with him; for the idea that subdues him will not be wanting to you; you will therefore, in him, pardon humanity; for you will comprehend it because you will possess it entirely. This is the only remedy against the malady of fanaticism; which whatever be its object proceeds from nothing but the prepossession of the mind by one object exclusively, whilst we are ignorant of and despise every other."²

Whatever may have been Bushnell's debt to such ideas in Cousin whose writings seem to have served to clarify his own convictions, he did not find the French thinker's analysis adequate. Cousin, according to Bushnell's interpretation, insisted that there can be but three schools of opinion about any question or problem. These three schools of opinion are: (a) the schools of the two extremes, and (b) a third school which undertakes to

¹Ibid., p. 196.

²Ibid., p. 199.

settle their relation or to comprehend them in a common view.¹

Our American thinker found a better analysis in the following:

- 1) First, he said, there comes up into light the one extreme and with or without controversy it is adopted.
- 2) After a while a second school, looking the dominant opinion in the face, sees something false in it and asserts the second extreme and then war follows between the extremes, while members of each regard the other as wholly repugnant and contrary. It is a war between simple truth and falsehood which no terms of peace can reconcile.
- 3) Meanwhile there is likely to appear a neutral school made up of those who are disposed to peace and who cannot escape the feeling that there is something extravagant or excessive in both the militant parties.

"These are the moderate men who praise moderate things, the wooden headed school, who dread nothing with so great reason as combustion of any sort. Hence it is the real problem with them to divide distances and settle themselves down as nearly midway between the poles as possible. Sometimes they are called in derision 'men of the fence' but they call themselves and more correctly 'neuters' that is neithers; for the real study and problem of their school is negative. It is not to find the truth as a positive form and law, but it is simply to find a position half-way between the two schools before them they are prudent but not wise. After spending thus a whole age or generation midway between somewhere and nowhere, they begin to feel that neutralities, after all, are more sickening than controversies, and they are willing possibly to go back and resume the old quarrel of the extremes, if it is only for the health of the exercise."²

- 4) The liberal school differs widely from the neutral. For while the timorous neutral is engaged to settle his position midway between extremes, the liberal is extending equal indulgence to both. The former is moved by prudence to himself, the latter by charity to others.

"Having no creed, in fact, save that other men shall be welcome to theirs--earnest in nothing save in vindicating the right of others to be earnest, counting it charity not to be anxious for the truth, but to be patient with all error,

¹Horace Bushnell, "Christian Comprehensiveness," Building Eras in Religion, pp. 396 ff.

²Ibid., pp. 397-98.

smiling indulgently upon all extremes, not caring how the truth may fare between them--the liberal school makes virtue of negation and freezes itself in the mild and gentle temperature it has mistaken for charity. The word 'liberal' is in fact a negative word, there is nothing positive in it."¹

5) The fifth school rises to complete the cycle. There rises now a man or a few men, who looking again at the two extreme schools begin to ask whether it is not possible to comprehend them; that is to receive, hold, practice all which made the extreme opinions true to their disciples.

"In the comprehensive school it will be a first conviction that all serious earnest men have something in their view which makes it truth to them; therefore that all serious earnest men, however repugnant in their words, have yet some radical agreement, and if the place can be found, will somewhere reveal their brotherhood. Therefore they are not only to tolerate but to love and respect each other. Nay they are each to ask, what has the other which is necessary to its own completeness in the truth? The endeavor to comprehend all antagonisms and hold the just equilibrium of truth is the highest and most ingenuous that a human soul can propose; one that only God can perfectly realize."²

Difficult as this goal is, it was toward just such a realization that Bushnell set himself. The truth was for him a synthesis of the partial glimpses of truth seen by those who seem to be poles apart.³

Our study has shown that this principle of "comprehensiveness" is the unifying principle of Bushnell's mediating theology. In seeking a solution of the practical problems investigated we have found this basic conviction to have been determinative. It is reflected in his attitudes toward the slavery question which

¹Ibid., p. 400.

²Ibid., pp. 402-3.

³The evident Hegelian flavor of his treatment naturally raises the question of the connection between Bushnell and the German philosopher. The sources indicate no direct quotation or reference to Hegel which leads to the conclusion that the Hegelian influence was felt indirectly through Victor Cousin. That the Frenchman came under the sway of Hegel whom he first met on his trip to Germany in 1817 is evident in his works. This was the year in which Hegel's Encyclopadie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften appeared, of which Cousin had one of the earliest copies (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 13th ed., VII, 330).

we found him discussing with a "comprehensive purpose."¹ The same guiding principle enabled him to find values in the strict discipline maintained in the observance of the sabbath and at the same time guarded him from making such discipline an end in itself rather than a means to an end.² The same comprehensive spirit was shown in his evaluation of revivals and revivalism. He refused to join those who dismissed wholesale these methods of religious work but found certain worths in them which many of their critics failed to recognize. At the same time he would not concede that progress and development in the churches were impossible apart from these evangelistic and often hyper-emotional expressions of religious zeal.³ Denominational contributions to the common spiritual life of the Church Universal were evaluated by him with this criterion of truth in mind. To the whole of Christian truth he found each group making a contribution.⁴

Our inductive investigation of Bushnell's major theological works has revealed that this conviction was determinative in his treatment of the vital theological issues of his day. His portrait of Man is painted neither with the slime and pitch of the filthy dauber called depravity nor with the whitewash brush of the romanticists. He gives us rather a composite photograph of our kind into the making of which the testimony of the presence of evident capacities for good in human stuff is printed together with the unpleasant facts of our evident capacities for evil--the whole being framed by a practical faith in the plasticity of human nature and its susceptibility to the touch of Christ upon it.⁵

In his treatment of the Christian conception of God, his comprehensive principle led him to sympathize with the intellectual quest for a unified world view based upon faith in One God, but we discovered that it also made him loath to part with the Trinitarian formula which was to his mind an algebraic symbol of no "bald philosophical unity" but the sign of a God discoverable as creatively and redemptively active in His world.⁶

His whole conception of the meaning of the doctrine of Atonement is but the further application of this principle of

¹See p. 38 of the complete dissertation, to be found only in the University of Chicago Libraries.

²Pp. 42-43 of the complete dissertation.

³Pp. 43-47 of the complete dissertation.

⁴Pp. 47-54 of the complete dissertation.

⁵Pp. 58 ff. of the complete dissertation.

⁶Pp. 99 ff. of the complete dissertation.

comprehensiveness. Beneath all the apparently conflicting symbols used by Christian theories of the meaning of the death of Christ he sees evidence of the moral influence of Christ upon those whom he has awakened to a new consciousness of sin, to repentance, and to renewal through the response of faith. These subjective aspects of the Christian's reaction to the stimulus confronted in the vicarious suffering of the Saviour must be discerned shining through the metaphors summoned from altar and court room for use in testimony when the experience is shared. Nevertheless Bushnell does not reduce the meaning of Atonement to the narrow confines of the psychology of religion, but seeks to show that the death of Christ does something for God and that the symbolism of the "altar forms," rightfully understood, speaks of this objective aspect of the work of Christ. In him the Divine Love has engaged in a redemptive endeavor at the cost of sacrifice and suffering which in a sense is self propitiating. Thus our theologian saves himself from the dogmatism which says that without certain theological presuppositions the death of Jesus may be counted upon to stir men to repentance. His comprehensive principle leads him to attempt a synthesis of the subjective and objective aspects of the work of Christ. The basic framework within which his thought of atonement moves, however, is that of the orthodox theories, namely, the pattern of sovereignty which pictures the relationship between the worshipper and his God in terms of the State, with a Fatherly Sovereign, 'tis true, upon the throne, but a Sovereign, nevertheless, called upon to deal with subjects in terms of guilt and punishment.¹

The very title of the volume which deals with the relationship between science and religion indicates that it belongs in the sequence of works created by a theologian with a "comprehensive" principle. The title, Nature and the Supernatural, as Together Constituting the One System of God, is indicative of this fact. As the shuttle of intelligent inquiry flies back and forth weaving together the warp of scientific data and the woof of religious insights, Bushnell refused to judge the whole by viewing it simply from the underside. Only when seen from above does the pattern in this seamless robe of truth appear intelligible and coherent. Convinced of the "rigid unity" of our world and the dependability of its behaviour, he defended the characteristically Christian thesis of the "supremacy of the spiritual." No matter if his thought led him to a dualism, which may seem to a present-day reader hard and fast, with things in one category

¹ Pp. 120 ff. of the complete dissertation.

and powers in the other; and no matter if he did seek unity by widening the chasm between the product of Nature we call man, and all her other creative attempts; and no matter if he did leave us with a concept of the Supernatural so transcendent that only on occasion does this Power become inserted into our order from without; nevertheless his comprehensive purpose is apparent and as a purpose is to be commended.

The inductive investigation of Bushnell's major theological works has shown how determinative in his treatment of the vital theological issues of his day his principle of "comprehensiveness" was. When the question is raised as to our evaluation of this principle in building a mediating theology a number of considerations arise.

a) Such a guiding principle in formulating a "systematic" theology is far superior to many of the underlying principles which have been determinative in building traditional systems of doctrine.

b) A theologian seriously motivated by such a principle is saved from the dogmatism which has been the bane of interpreters of religion, liberal as well as conservative.

c) The application of this principle in the interpretation of the Christian religion would save theology from the inbreeding which results from too narrow a conception of its function.

d) A theology so constructed would be the work of men who keep contact with the culture of the age. They would be concerned not simply to maintain a sympathetic appreciation of the Zeitgeist but would welcome data unearthed and insights gained by workers in other fields of human interest than that of the professional interpreters of religion. Such a theology would become vital as a result of informative contact with biology, psychology, the social sciences, comparative religions, and the philosophy which grows out of discoveries made in such fields.

e) Such a theology, guided by a "comprehensive" purpose would make for progress because it would constitute one of the growing points in Protestantism. The narrowness of sectarianism, the bigotry of denominational exclusiveness and pride with their consequent product of timidity of thought in the face of tremendous challenges to the Christian religion, are being overcome by the process of community and national and international programs of co-operation. An increasingly large leaven in American church life, composed of students of our Faith motivated by a "comprehensive" purpose to understand the viewpoint of those whose theological interpretations differ, would work toward a spirit of mutuality often surprisingly lacking because no effort has been made to understand one another.

f) Such a theology would be purposely incomplete. It would be indeed a growing science. The interpreters of it would seek to cultivate the capacity to hold tenaciously to convictions produced by the impact of our inherited Christian tradition, and the measure of religious insight personally achieved, and at the same time to maintain the mind set of the seeker--a consummation devoutly to be wished.

b. Bushnell made an anthropocentric approach to theology.

There is a sense in which we might say that New England theology from Jonathan Edwards onward was concerned with anthropology. Indeed Bushnell's teacher, Nathaniel W. Taylor, came into disrepute among his brethren because of his conception of the will and the new and real freedom which he gave to man. But we have discovered that young Bushnell was early in revolt against the speculative method by means of which theological questions were handled by the technique then in vogue at New Haven. It seemed to him that purely academic considerations bulked too large. He sought to relate theology to religion.

He was aware of the fallacy of abstraction common among theologians and he held in disrepute that "deductive, proving, spinning method of practical investigation, commonly denoted by the term logical."¹ We have found him equally impatient with the efforts of theological definition makers who would probe the mysteries of the metaphysical distinctions in the Godhead, or plumb the depths of the profound relationship between the Divine and the Human in the Person of Christ.² He seems to prefer to remain reverently ignorant on such questions. It was enough for him to be certain that man may discover God who discloses Himself as creatively and redemptively operative. It is enough to know that Jesus Christ is "that Holy Thing in which my God is brought to me." He is not satisfied, therefore, with a theology which makes its point of departure and its goal an inherited doctrinal system no matter how hoary with age. He engages in the task of building a theology, with the aid of this inherited treasure, but constructed upon observable facts in the field of religious experience. For him theology is not "doctrina de deo et rebus divinis" but rather

¹Horace Bushnell, God in Christ, Three Discourses Delivered at New Haven, Cambridge and Andover with a Preliminary Dissertation on Language (Hartford: 1849; Centenary ed., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 57.

²See pp. 102 ff. of the complete dissertation.

a science of religion. He stresses the practical as over against the theoretical. His theology is theocentric in its goal but anthropocentric in its approach.

This anthropocentric approach to theology we have discovered illustrated in Bushnell's works in three striking respects: (a) In his theory of language which furnishes us with a key to his "system"; (b) in the centrality given his religious insights which he gained progressively throughout the various stages of his development; (c) in his pastoral interest which tended to make his treatment of theological problems empirical. Let us note each of these.

a) There is a marked contrast between the mind set of the lawyer-trained theologian Tertullian and that of the lawyer-trained theologian Bushnell. The former began and ended with the divinely authorized "Rule of Faith" and welcomed discussion but only the kind of discussion which moves within the circle of the statement of this "Rule" beyond which curiosity ought not to roam.

"So long, however, as its form (i.e. The Rule of Faith) exists in its proper order, you may seek and discuss as much as you please and give full reign to your curiosity, in whatever seems to you to hang in doubt, or to be shrouded in obscurity."¹

In contrast to this Bushnell lays the foundation for a theological structure by investigating the problem of human knowledge. For him what we can determine about God and things divine depends largely upon our theory of epistemology. Basically this is the problem upon which Bushnell is at work in his discussions of language. Although we have failed to find in his writings direct allusions to Immanuel Kant in this connection he is really dealing with Kant's problem. He is concerned with the study of the subjective conditions of all knowledge as introductory to any attempt to systematize "religious" knowledge.²

¹Tertullian, The Prescription Against Heretics: Ante-Nicene Fathers, III, 249.

²George A. Gordon, The Christ of Today (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1895), p. 287: "It is remarkable that Dr. Bushnell, whose studies kept him wholly ignorant of Kant, is nevertheless dealing with Kant's problem in his rather diffuse 'Dissertation of Language' and in his far clearer, compacter and finer production, 'Our Gospel a Gift to the Imagination.' He saw and it is a remarkable witness to his genius, that thought is inseparable from sense forms, and so called abstract thinking is but thought with the sensuous accompaniment attenuated to the last degree."

And yet, concerned as Bushnell was with the limitations of theological knowledge, it appears to the student of his writings dealing with this theme that he did not go to the heart of the problem. As G. B. Stevens points out,¹ Bushnell deals with the nature and limits of theological knowledge by giving us a theory concerning the instrument of thought rather than of thought itself. He drew a circle of limitation around theology by showing that it employed a defective medium.

We have seen that this technique led our theologian to see that in a sense all thinking is "picture" thinking. He regarded as basic the discovery that the communication of thought or emotion from man to man requires some image or figure in the world of sense perception as a fit representation of the thought or emotion and that where this image or figure becomes a common sign or conception of the same internal state the two will understand each other. Such concepts are instruments and by customary usage become "interpreters in sound, when they themselves are out of sight." With this general observation as a base line he moves on to face the implications of it for religious knowledge. As we have seen, he points out the analogical character of religious thought and the figurative sense in which religious terms are used. He is convinced that "religion has no language of its own only the language of metaphor." The far reaching implications of this idea for any system of doctrine we have traced.

Bushnell was well aware of the potency of words. It is a tribute to his intelligence to find him battling with the problem of language and its relationship to the control of the religious life of men. He would have appreciated the work of the social psychologist of these more recent times. In a way he anticipated the labors of scholars in this field who have made extensive studies of language both in its relationship to communication, to the development and socialization of the individual and in its relationship to social participation and control. He would have followed with interest studies of the way in which language reflects the whole social situation in which we live and move and have our being.

There is in fact a striking similarity in tone between certain passages in Bushnell's discussions and our contemporary treatments of language and symbol. He would read with relish and understanding present-day works in social psychology which develop the thesis that language is symbolical and instrumental in its

¹"Horace Bushnell and Albrecht Ritschl, A Comparison," American Journal of Theology, VI (January, 1902), 39 ff.

meaning. He would agree with those who point out that all thinking is conducted by the use of words and that much depends upon the words which get prestige from the dominant activities to which they first apply.¹ He would quite agree with Kimball Young who asserts that "patterns are bound up with meanings which are largely social in origin and which can be understood only in terms of the social cultural milieu."² While aware of the anachronism, we may say that Bushnell would discover a congenial spirit in Hobson who points to mechanical metaphors which play a great part in our present-day discussions of the social sciences as an illustration of the analogical character of much of our thinking. He says:

"Common thought and action influence and direct social sciences in another and subtler fashion. All thinking of an abstract order involves the employment of words in a metaphorical sense. The nature of the metaphors employed depends upon the dominant trend of the interests and activities of the common people. The very atmosphere in which social problems are conceived and presented will be saturated with the feelings and thought processes of this common life."³

Bushnell could have entered sympathetically into an understanding of Walter Lippmann's dilemma in his Preface to Morals where he indicates the inadequacy of traditional religious symbols for the emancipated victim of the "acids of modernity."

"Because the popular religion of supernatural governments is undermined, the symbols of religion do not provide clear channels of religious experience. They are choked with the debris of dead notions in which men are unable to believe and unwilling to disbelieve. The result is a frustration of inner life which will persist as long as the leaders of thought speak of God in more senses than one."⁴

But it is a mistake to identify the interest of Bushnell in language and the interest of the social psychologist. There are striking differences apparent. Whereas the concern of these present-day students of language is primarily in the use of words as tools of social control, Bushnell's concern is with words as signs of religious adjustment. Whereas a Kimball Young speaks of

¹Kimball Young, Social Psychology, An Analysis of Social Psychology (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1930), p. 397.

²Ibid.

³J. A. Hobson, Free Thought in the Social Sciences (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), p. 22.

⁴Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Morals (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929), pp. 325-26.

language as having a twofold nature, being either objective, directive and calmly logical, or, on the other hand, derisive, imaginative and fanciful, Bushnell speaks of two departments of language, the one related to objects of sense but the second dealing with the "spiritual" in his two-story world. While the sophisticated modern observes and criticizes his contemporaries for using stereotypes as short-hand substitutes for thought and pleads for definition of terms, Bushnell does not try to make definitions of religious "stereotypes" adequate but pleads for a recognition of the fact that the objects of religious devotion defy accurate definition and can only be pictured correctly by the aid of a multiplicity of metaphorical symbols.¹

While we say that he anticipated later thinkers who have investigated language in the light of facts which Bushnell never could have known, he did not arrive at a full recognition of the implications of his own treatment. He did recognize the metaphorical character of religious terminology and in a measure realized the relationship between concepts used in religion and social practice. He advised the use of multiple metaphors in order to show the many-sided nature of religious experience. He urged the modification of theological terms in the light of the metaphorical character of the patterns employed in theology. But he did not move on to discover a new set of patterns more meaningful to the children of the new age than the old ever could have been because freighted with contemporaneous significance. He came close to making this step but did not make it. This we found true in his treatment of the Atonement where the basic pattern remains that of sovereignty in spite of his modification of terminology and treatment.

He did not achieve the insight into the nature of Christian doctrine gained by those who appreciate not merely the analogical character of the political framework in which Christian thought has been traditionally set but who see that when most sincerely believed in the analogy is regarded to be more than metaphor--unquestioned fact. Like all explanation religious explanation relates the unknown to the familiar and the unquestioned. This

¹The suggestion of this contrast between the interest of Bushnell and the interest of the social psychologist in language grew out of the discussion of Bushnell in a Seminar led by Professor A. C. McGiffert, Jr. (Spring Quarter, 1932: Chicago Theological Seminary). The writer feels indebted to the members of this group for many seed-thoughts developed and incorporated in the present study.

fact is stated by Shailer Mathews, thus:

"When the past spoke of God as spirit or as sovereign, when the practices of courtiers and the conceptions of law courts were employed to describe men's relation with God, such descriptions were not regarded as analogical but as elements in the religious conceptions themselves. That is to say they were patterns rather than metaphors. For a pattern is a social institution or practice used to give content and intelligibility to otherwise unrationalized beliefs. What the axiom is to mathematics a pattern is in thought."¹

There is involved in such an insight, when the outmoded mental framework proves inadequate, the imperative not merely to revivify the dead dogma but to discover new ways of relating experienced religious values to the unquestioned presuppositions of contemporaneous culture. In this direction Bushnell's thought was not radical.

The recognition of the contribution which he did make, however, to our thought concerning the use of religious terms and the evaluation of his treatment leads us to see how anthropocentric his approach to theology was.

b) This same characteristic is demonstrated in the centrality given by Bushnell to religious experience. His appeal is not to the authority of the Bible as an external norm, although he often uses Biblical texts as proof perfect for the viewpoint he is maintaining. His appeal is not to an authoritative body of doctrine, although as we have seen he estimates very highly these inherited symbols of the Christian faith. He rather makes an appeal to the authority of religious experience. As we have seen, he rated the intuitive insights gained in moments of religious exaltation high in the scale of importance among other criteria of truth.

His technique is therefore anthropocentric in this further respect, namely, that his theology is an exposition of the meaning of his own religious experience which he regarded as typical. He was quite frank in outlining his own development in the religious life and in one letter to his wife he charts the progress of this development and the corresponding insights gained into the doctrinal significance of his experience.

"I never saw so distinctly as now what it is to be a disciple, or what the key-note is of all most Christly experience. I think, too, that I have made my last discovery in this mine. First, I was led along into initial experience of God,

¹ Shailer Mathews, The Atonement and the Social Process (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), p. 31.

socially and by force of the blind religious instinct in my nature; second, I was advanced into the clear moral light of Christ and of God, as related to the principle of rectitude; next, or third, I was set on by the inward personal discovery of Christ, and of God as represented in him; now fourth, I lay hold of and appropriate the general culminating fact of God's vicarious character in goodness, and of mine to be accomplished in Christ as a follower. My next stage of discovery will be when I drop the body and go home, to be with Christ in the conscious openly revealed friendship of a soul whose affinities are with him."¹

This graph of the stages in his own religious experience gives a significant insight into the relationship between his theology and his religious experience. He saw truth. At this juncture he tells us that he sees what it means to be a Christian and he feels a strong desire that he might "get ripe under God's teachings in this way and be able to add some light to the very partial light of our times." As a pastor-theologian he found himself not only influenced by Schleiermacher who emphasized the autonomy of religious experience and its emotional phase as a "feeling of absolute dependence" but he found himself qualified to understand religion and theology which it produces because he met Schleiermacher's requirements for that understanding--he stood inside a pious soul.

Instead of beginning, therefore, with an inherited doctrinal system, or with the fruitful analogies by means of which humans attempt to share their experiences of God, he began with the wealth of intuitive moral and spiritual insights, which have always characterized the religious experience of Christians. This experience he thought of as antedating Christianity's Holy Book and its creedal formulae. Interested in mediation between varying theological viewpoints he felt himself equipped thus to understand the various descriptions of the Christian's apprehension of God which different theological statements offer. This emphasis which he consistently made upon the reality of the Christian's knowledge of God and the validity of the Christian's religious experience undoubtedly did serve to gain for him and his theological reinterpretations a hearing in quarters which otherwise would have been deaf to his cry. Undoubtedly this stress served also a pedagogical function in his pulpit ministry. For a theology so constructed conserved much that was precious to those of an entirely different theological viewpoint and which they were really concerned to

¹Mary Bushnell Cheney, The Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 445-46.

defend and propagate.

The time had not yet come to analyze the "religious experience" into the various elements of which it was composed. Indeed it was regarded as ultimate and not subject to analysis. Nor was the idea advanced that insights gained intuitively deserve scrutiny and evaluation in the light of the total experience of life. These questions waited to be raised later. It was, however, a tremendous gain to do just what Bushnell did in showing that doctrine is one of the fruits of religion. In this stress his theology is anthropocentric.

c) Further, the pastoral interest of our theologian tended to make his treatment of theological problems empirical. He belongs to the line of pastors who from the matrix of actually dealing with people in the flesh have made significant contributions to the development of Christian theology. His characteristic emphasis in every theological discussion is upon its relation to the religious life, to the task of developing the religious attitudes of people. His theology arises out of concrete situations in the practical life of the church.

This interest is demonstrated again and again in the inductive study of his works. We have found him more interested in children than in a system which forgot them. He wants a view of God which makes Him a living reality, creatively and redemptively at work in His world rather than a neat philosophical unity. His thought of atonement begins and issues in the idea of Christian morality and not in metaphysical court room scenes. We have discovered him building a world view with man at its center and Christianity making him decent and brotherly. He dares to transcendentalize the best he finds in humans, namely, forgiveness of an enemy through sacrificial helpfulness and uncalculating love--declaring that God can be no less. For him, as for L. P. Jacks, "the soul of man is the universe turned outside in."¹ For this pastor, as for every worker in the field of religion who must deal with humans at close grips with life, theology is functional. Bushnell is not motivated by an academic but by a practical motive--the desire to relate people helpfully to themselves, to the social group and to the cosmic order upon which we are all dependent. This preacher and pastor makes his approach to the theory of his religion along the pathway of empirical observation of the response of humans to the stimulus presented by great compelling concepts in our faith. Living loyalties illuminate for him dead

¹ J. Baillie, The Interpretation of Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 95.

dogma. He faces the baffling problem of evil and finds a solution in the "Moral Uses of Dark Things." This shepherd of souls is a humanist in his concern for the enrichment of human life but his humanism has its roots in the very structure of the universe.

In these three ways, then, his theology may be described as anthropocentric; in his basic concern with language as an instrument of theological thought; in his significant use of religious intuitive insights; in his pastoral concern to keep theological theory close to religious life.

c. As a mediating theologian Bushnell was concerned to conserve the emotional values of religion.

His experience as a pastor taught this practical psychologist to recognize a human as a unit. He realized that people are not all head. They have hearts. He realized that men build up emotional loyalties around objects and terms of religious devotion. While much of his ministry was engaged in helping Christians re-examine these terms, hoary with age, and fraught with accumulated associations which were precious, and while under his guidance the objects of religious devotion were subjected to scrutiny and reinterpretation he did not make the mistake of supposing that religious living is simply a matter of building a satisfactory intellectual formulation of the meaning of the Christian religion. He seems to have sensed the fact that we are "behaving" beings as well as thinking beings. However arrived at, and irrespective of the question as to whether the matter ever came up into the light of conscious purpose in his mediating ministry, the fact is that he did not become so preoccupied with the task of defining the Object of religious devotion that the emotional aspects of religion were forgotten. In his zeal to make religion more intelligible and intellectually respectable he did not lose sight of the strength of the emotional ties which bound men to older dogmas.

This interest explains his reaction against a barren rationalism in theology. This typical reaction which we found expressed in his treatment of "Dogma and Spirit"¹ is met with again and again in his sermons. On one occasion we find him preaching on "The Reason of Faith" seeking to correct the mistake of those who assume that the "gospel is theorem." The effort to mill out a scheme of free will and responsibility, to settle metaphysically questions of ability and inability, and to show the scheme of regeneration as related to a theory of sin, no matter how ingenious,

¹ See pp. 94 ff. of the complete dissertation.

he dismisses as "scarcely more than a form of rationalism."

"Feeding on such notional and abstract wisdom and not on Christ, the bread that came down from heaven, we grow at once more ingenious in the head and more shallow in the heart, and in just the compound ratio of both more naturalistic and sceptical."¹

Viewed from this angle his theory of language endeavors to make usable in an intelligent fashion religious terms with certain emotional associations but which had come to be empty of meaning to the thoughtful people of his day. His theology is designed to enable his contemporaries to recapture the attitudes which formerly had made those ancient terms meaningful and which they were originally intended to partially express. The best illustration of his use of this technique is in his handling of the doctrine of atonement. Here we found him translating old phrases into subjective states. The reconciliation of the race to God really means the renovation of the character of men. He moves forward on the supposition that if he can get people to see this relationship between the experienced fact, namely, that Christ has the power to renew the character of men, and the "altar forms" by which another age voiced this fact, that the same heart-warming emotional adjustment may be counted upon to be made around the new insight into the meaning of "Faith in Christ" as was once achieved by the older form of the doctrine of penal or substitutionary satisfaction and propitiation.

His conviction that all doctrinal statements are far from being infallible led him to insist that "the soundest doctrine that we can furnish will in God's opinion be the doctrine of the heart; 'For it is a good thing (and an excellent cure for strange doctrine) that the heart be established in grace.'² This expression, "the doctrine of the heart," recalls the picture of Bushnell in his own struggle for religious adjustment drawn for us by one of his college mates in 1831 during the revival at Yale. He is portrayed as coming to the daily meeting of his fellow tutors and impetuously exclaiming

"What shall I do with these arrant doubts I have been nursing for years? When the preacher touches the Trinity and when

¹Horace Bushnell, Sermons for the New Life (New York: Charles Scribner, 1858), p. 106.

²Horace Bushnell, Christ in Theology; Being an Answer of the Author Before the Hartford Central Association of Ministers, October, 1849, for the Doctrines of the Book Entitled, God in Christ (Hartford, 1851), p. 79.

logic shatters it all to pieces, I am at the four winds. But I am glad I have a heart as well as a head. My heart wants the Father; my heart wants the Son; my heart wants the Holy Ghost--and one just as much as the other. My heart says that the Bible has a Trinity for me, and I mean to hold by my heart. I am glad a man can do it when there is no other mooring."¹

In his maturity he continued to give feeling a large place in his conception of the Christian religion recognizing that whatever else a human is he is more than "a thinking machine." This emphasis led him to advise parents in his discussion of religious pedagogy that they "should rather seek to teach a feeling than a doctrine"²

"to bathe the child in their own feeling of love to God, and dependence on him, and contrition for wrong before him, bearing up their child's heart in their own, not fearing to encourage every good motion they can call into exercise: to make what is good happy and attractive, what is wrong odious and hateful; then as the understanding advances to give it food suited to its capacity, opening upon it gradually the more difficult views of Christian doctrine and experience."

But even when it came to some of these "more difficult views of Christian doctrine" we found Bushnell mindful of the emotional needs of men, needs which religion serves. We found him urging the cultivation of a kind of aesthetic appreciation if the deeper meanings of the Christian faith are to be achieved. He discouraged his readers and hearers from robbing themselves of the inspiration and stimulation which they might receive from Christ simply because they do not succeed in working out a metaphysical theory of his person. He urges an appreciative attitude toward Jesus instead of making him "a new riddle of the speculative chemistry and constructive logic of the race." There is a sense in which the Gospel is a "Gift to the Imagination." There is a knowledge of God and Christian truth which is of the heart "for right sensibility is as truly perceptive as reason, and there are many truths of the highest moment, that can never find us, save as we offer a congenial sensibility to them."³ At times he viewed the gospel as a magnificent work of art and its sufficient interpretation an aesthetic talent.

¹Cheney, op. cit., p. 56.

²Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture (New York: Charles Scribner, 1861), p. 51.

³Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 302.

Nowhere does he put more clearly his appreciation of the emotional needs of man's life to which religion may minister than in his sermon on Regeneration. This theological term he expounds as a short-hand symbol for the "changing of one's reigning love." After showing that every man's life is shaped by his dominant love he points out the way in which Christianity changes a "man's settled affinity"¹ so that his life proceeds from a new center of loyalty and trust. In such terms he thought of the unification of personality around an all inclusive loyalty centering in Jesus Christ, an integration resulting in all the emotional satisfactions which accompany a life so unified that it passes from the stripping of the gears stage, or mere traveling in low, into the efficiency, exhilaration, and speed of traveling "in high."

In seeking to help students "dissolve" their doubts this same insight into the fact that religion is a matter of the adjustment of the entire personality is evident. We found him speaking at Yale of the growing certainty of God which comes to the person who sets out with intellectual honesty upon the religious quest. Basic for success here is not merely keen cutting intelligence but the steadfast purpose to live up to the truth one knows. "For truth is something to be lived else it might as well not be." Launching out in prayer and faith and trust upon the conviction that whatever else God may be he is a "right God" Bushnell promised to every sincere religious seeker a growing awareness of God with its consequent beneficial adjustment of life to its total Environment. But this certainty of God is something sanctioned by emotional satisfactions. "A being so profoundly felt, must inevitably be."²

Our mediator demonstrates in his works, then, a sincere desire for religious ideas that are scientifically accurate but he is mindful of the emotional demands which religion serves to meet in the human life most completely adjusted to its subjective, social and cosmic environment. Undoubtedly this fact contributed to the measure of success achieved by Bushnell as a mediating theologian.

d. Bushnell legitimized his religious insights by relating them to ideas which were regarded as axiomatic by his contemporaries.

Our study has shown Horace Bushnell living and doing his work against the background of an actual historical situation.

¹Bushnell, Sermons for the New Life, pp. 118-19.

²Horace Bushnell, Sermons on Living Subjects (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1872), p. 177.

He is an interpreter of the Christian religion to people living in New England at a time when they were being made aware of tension between their religious heritage and new conditions under which they must live. All about him we have seen groups of Christians making the characteristic adjustments which Christians proverbially make when such tension arises. Some were engaged in the hopeless task of ignoring the new conditions and seeking to maintain at all costs (and even recreate if necessary) the old days before the tension arose. Such a temper formed the "Connecticut Pastoral Union" and founded the "Theological Institute of Connecticut" in 1833-34.¹ Others made a radical adjustment in the opposite direction abandoning the hindering inheritances, breaking deliberately with the past and making a fresh start. This in general was the solution which, under the leadership of Theodore Parker, the Unitarians felt themselves driven to make and in particular the way out chosen by that superb individualist Ralph Waldo Emerson.² But in between stands Bushnell who undertakes to evaluate and reinterpret the religious inheritances in such a fashion as to meet the needs of the new day.

The investigation of the technique of this mediator engaged in such a task reveals the fact that he sought to legitimize his religious insights by relating them to ideas which were regarded as axiomatic by his contemporaries. There are at least three ways in which we detect him doing this. (a) He substantiates his positions by maintaining that they are Biblical. (b) He makes an eclectic use of scientific data and of the opinions of men of science. (c) He assumes the rôle of attorney for the defense of a Law-Abiding God.

a) Upon the basis of Bushnell's major theological works it is evident that he regarded the Bible, as far as he himself was concerned, to be primarily a record of religious experience. Following Schleiermacher and his own patron saint, Coleridge, he did not regard the Bible as an external authority in matters of doctrine but as the source book which stimulates Christian God-consciousness through shared religious experience. It is an inspired book because of the experienced way in which it "finds" him at his deepest depths. When his daughter confessed that she "did not get life from the Bible" he wrote to her in 1861:

"My own experience is that the Bible is dull when I am dull; and that when I am really alive, and set in upon the text with a tidal pressure of living affinities, it opens, multiplies

¹See p. 18 of the complete dissertation.

²See pp. 24 ff. of the complete dissertation.

discoveries and reveals depths even faster than I can note them."¹

That his conservative brethren found Bushnell hopelessly lacking in his attitude toward the Bible is evidenced in writings which grew out of the controversy which raged around him. In these writings, which mirror our theologian through the minds of sincere men who differed from him, the Fairfield West Association criticized Bushnell for advocating that interpreters of our faith should accept what they may from the Bible through sensibility, taste and imagination and then construct their theology out of consciousness. This they maintained would make theology as variable as the experience of different men and of the same men at different times. It would require theology to be continually in the process of formation and re-formation and would make heresy impossible. It is perfectly clear that these men understood the implications of what Bushnell was saying no matter how they failed to comprehend his position on the use of religious symbols, when they accused him of preaching what he did not believe.²

There are indications that while in general he took the attitude toward the scriptures which placed the emphasis upon their religious rather than their doctrinal content he did not adhere consistently to that position. We find him again and again building upon facts recorded in scripture with the unexpressed assumption that the mere finding of a conception or a statement in the Bible was adequate authority to establish its validity. The fall of Adam, angels, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, miracles and charisms are all found in the Bible and consequently are all in the reconstructed system which Horace Bushnell erects.

This reverence for the Book was a reverence which Bushnell shared with the majority of those whom he addressed from the pulpit and through his pen. And although, as we have seen, his basic doctrinal positions were arrived at without an appeal to an external scriptural authority but by an appeal to the intuitive insights which he believed all Christians shared, and although, as we have seen, he refused to think of inspiration as having ceased when the canon was closed, yet he felt the necessity of establishing the validity of those insights by the aid of scriptural proof. Since for himself and for those addressed anything which was shown to be scriptural was regarded as worthy of respect, we find him

¹Cheney, op. cit., pp. 443-44.

²See An Appeal of the Association of Fairfield West to the Associated Ministers Connected with the General Association of Connecticut (New York: Baker, Godwin & Co., 1852).

frequently substantiating his positions by maintaining that they are Biblical.

An example of this technique which could be duplicated many times if necessary follows. In the Vicarious Sacrifice the third chapter shows that there is no necessary conflict between the Divine Attributes of Justice and Mercy. In the first ten pages of the chapter he labors to share with us an insight which is central in the thesis of this volume, namely, that "God's instituted law really commands through love and sacrifice" and that these accomplish what penal enforcement and punishment never could. Then the Scriptures are called to witness that this insight is correct. An investigation of this source material shows that "God nowhere signifies that he has given up the world to the prior right of justice and that mercy shall come in only as she pays a gate-fee for the right of entrance."¹ Two passages often cited to prove the opposite are then re-evaluated and discovered, when properly understood, to stand for just what Bushnell is contending for (Ps. 85: 10 and Jas. 2: 13). There then follows a long catalog of scriptural passages which support the author's interpretation. These proof texts are gleaned from both the Old and New Testaments and are strung together like beads on a thread, the thread being the idea that the Justice and Mercy of God are not in conflict. A similar method is frequently used in the discussion of doctrinal matters.

If the present-day critic of Bushnell accuses him of failure to demonstrate a thoroughgoing training in the historical and exegetical study of the scriptures so that, for example, the data from the Fourth Gospel and from the Synoptics flow together indiscriminately, the fact remains that this man knew how to use the Bible to convince those who needed its support for their religious beliefs. He is a mediating theologian who substantiates his theological positions growing out of religious insights by maintaining that they are Biblical.

b) Another example of his technique in relating his religious message to the axiomatic ideas which formed the mental furnishings of his contemporaries is in his use of the findings of science.

He personally belonged to the group of thinkers who were beginning to feel the impact of the scientific method and he dwelt among a people who were subjected to this same subtle influence. How true this is we found indicated in the volume which was designed to relate in a systematic way these two great fields of

¹Horace Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation (1868 ed.; New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1866), pp. 276 ff.

human investigation and endeavor, Nature and the Supernatural.¹ He realized that a truth arrived at scientifically had a ring of authority about it and he knew that in dealing with thoughtful people the same sort of ring was desirable in the discussion of religion. This conviction which has been born in the human mind by the stubborn process of more than three hundred years of scientific research is much more general and deep-seated today than it was in Bushnell's time but even then the validity of the scientific method was coming to be regarded as axiomatic.

When we ask what use of this idea is made by our theologian we find two suggestions. He made an eclectic use of scientific data furnished by the physical sciences and the opinions of men of science in these fields were put to similar employment. The first he used for illustrative purposes and the second for testimony. In dealing with the same topic just discussed, namely, the relationship between the justice and mercy of God, he insists that they work together with no real antagonistic trends in evidence. The two are related like centrifugal and centripetal forces. These show that

"order and static equilibrium are, in fact the resultant of contending forces. Were either one of these to stop its endeavor the condition of wreck would be forthcoming speedily."²

In a similar way the apparent antagonism between the modes of Divine action observed between "the law-power of God's statutes and the justifying power of Christ" is seen to be only apparent and what actually takes place is that "the grip of law and justice upon the soul" has for its complement the "blessed attractions" of "grace-power" and both together accomplish the object of God's government in the reconciliation of fallen men to God. Such a homiletical use of illustrations drawn from science meets us in Bushnell.

In a more direct fashion we find him making an eclectic use of contemporaneous science in his Nature and the Supernatural. As an interpreter of religion he is interested in a teleological world view and he finds evidence for the idea of premeditation of God in the facts of science.

"It accords with this general view of the subject, as related to mind, that our most qualified teachers in science

¹Horace Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, as Together Constituting the One System of God (1883 ed.; New York: Charles Scribner, 1858). See pp. 139 ff. of the complete dissertation.

²Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice, pp. 272-74.

discover so many tokens of premeditation or anticipative thought, in the earlier types and creations of the world."¹ This grand fact he finds verified by Mr. Agassiz in his Essay on Classification. He quotes Professor Dana writing in the New Englander about a "remarkable oneness of system, binding together in a single plan or scheme the successive events or creations from the earliest coral or shell fish to man."² He calls to witness the whole course of geology with its "whole tossing, rending, recomposing process" for this symbolizes to his mind the grand spiritual catastrophe, the Christian new creation of man and the Eternal Forethought.³ In such passages Bushnell seems to be doing what is commonly done today when an interpreter of religion capitalizes a paragraph from Eddington or J. Y. Simpson in the support of a spiritual view of the world, or when a defender of the custom of worship quotes an authority in the field of mental hygiene to testify in terms of a new jargon in favor of an ancient fact. By quoting the Whiteheads,⁴ the Eddingtons, the Simpsons of his day, Bushnell, the theologian, was doing what needs to be done over and over again. He was seeking to relate his religious insights to ideas which were regarded by his contemporaries as axiomatic.

c) Bushnell assumed the rôle of attorney for the defense of a Law-Abiding God. This lawyer-trained-pastor-theologian relates his religious insights to a law-abiding universe. We have found him dealing with the practical question of the religious education of children in his Christian Nurture. Here he did nothing if he did not seek to reduce to dependable principle the prevailing idea that God was bringing men to renewal of moral character in ways which are so mysterious that they are past finding out. Confronted

¹Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 202.

²Ibid., p. 203.

³Ibid., p. 206.

⁴An unskilful use of this method of proving what seems obvious to religious insight motivated the following lines, entitled "The Canon of Concretion":

"Saints Matthew, Mark and Luke we find
Quaint products of their age.
Queer constructs of first century mind
Footprints of 'Q' on every page!

"But Lo! half gods, when the gods depart!
New Scriptures do appear!
Warm thyself, cold and hungry heart!
Saint Whitehead now is here!"

by the evident fact that in theological discussions half the difficulty between divergent viewpoints is due to failure to understand the figurative character of religious terminology, he worked out his theory of language in an effort to show that a law underlay the chaotic confusion caused by the use of doctrinal stereotypes. He pointed out that there are two departments in every language, the physical which provides names for things and the figurative which provides names for objects which cannot be arrived at by sense perception. These two departments of speech testify, he said, to the fact that the whole universe of nature is a perfect analogon of the whole universe of thought and spirit. By this method he brought into relationship the vocabulary of inherited religious testimony and a law-abiding world. In the face of a tradition which insisted upon the solitariness of the isolation of the Cross of Christ in relationship to all else in human history, we found Bushnell relating even Calvary to a universe of law and order by showing that the Vicarious Sacrifice of the Saviour is in keeping with the universal principle of love. One of his last publications we found to be engaging him in the task, still incomplete, of relating "Forgiveness and Law." In the field of apologetics he sought to validate the Christian gospel on a similar basis by showing the law-abiding character of both sin and salvation, both the natural and the supernatural.

Such a review indicates the mediator at work relating his religious insights to ideas which were axiomatic for himself and his contemporaries. His training in the Law, and his native interest in the study of the physical sciences both served to condition his thought in this respect. But undoubtedly the stirring events of contemporaneous history contributed to this concern for the law-abiding. On the part of his thoughtful hearers in the Northern States in the critical years when the basic law of the land was being tested and strained to the breaking point of war, people were not adverse to hearing that the truths of their religion were on unshakable foundations. Hence the mediator brings the law-abiding, physical and moral universe, and the law-abiding, dependable Christ into close-knit relationship.

Thus Bushnell legitimized his religious insights by relating them to axiomatic patterns of thought taken for granted by his times; the authority of the Bible in the field of religion; the authority of science; and the authority of physical, moral and civil law. Happy is the theologian in any age who is enough of a child of his era to recognize the patterns of thought which carry inherently conviction to the minds and conscience of his contemporaries, and having recognized such, gains the skill required to restate the wealth of tested religious inheritances in terms at once vital and significant.

e. As a mediating theologian Bushnell was concerned to show that he represented continuity with historic Christianity.

When Doctor James Moffatt assumed his duties as the occupant of the Chair of Church History in the Union Theological Seminary he interpreted his conception of the significance of his field in the following fashion.

"When men are indifferent to the history of their faith they tend to be thin in conceiving or promoting its future. There is a divine power of guidance and suggestion in tradition, in the transmitted piety and collective reverence of the past which no abuses should be permitted to conceal from the self confident eyes of our modernism. . . . The corporate sense of the great Church, the tested experience of the body spiritual, is at least as likely to be right as any individual in these later days, however young, or loud, or self-endowed with the misleading title 'prophetic'. . . . To break with the past is to lose touch with the forces that on any sound analysis are to control the future."¹

Bushnell did not arrive at his theological convictions as a result of immersing himself in the history of dogma. In fact he represents a reaction from the power of the dead. He rather trusted the validity of the fresh intuitive insights which came to him in the living present. While he is perhaps the best theological representative in America of the Romantic movement with its stress upon feeling he did not demonstrate the Romanticists' interest in history as such. This is due in part to his date. His work came too early to feel the full effects of the influences set in motion by Hegel who motivated such an interest in the historical study of the scriptures, the life of Jesus, and the development of Christian dogma. He did not reproduce Schleiermacher's interest in the past.

It certainly can be said that he was not interested in establishing a reputation as a traditionalist. He wrote to Dr. Bartol, "I believe nothing in orthodoxy but all in the Lord Jesus Christ."² His temper in this regard is clearly stated in his Christ in Theology where we see him on the defensive.

"I hope it will not be suspected that I am anxious, in the historic references I make, to establish a reputé of orthodoxy. I will even declare to you beforehand that I am not

¹Union Theological Seminary "Alumni Bulletin."

²Cheney, op. cit., p. 414.

orthodox according to any precise type of orthodoxy that I know."¹

But when this is recognized we must also point out that Bushnell upon occasion did make a "proof-text" use of Christian thought in previous ages. This seems to be his treatment of Anselm's Cur Deus Homo in the introduction to The Vicarious Sacrifice.² For here he expounds the father of the church in order to show that what Anselm really meant to say was what Bushnell has in mind. He commends Anselm because he "shocks no moral sentiment," and then criticizes him because he did not see things as clearly as his New England critic did. It is a matter of deep regret that "the gate stood ajar and he looked in through the opening but could not enter."³

It is only when Bushnell has met opposition and is in need of ammunition for the battle that he turns to history. And he finds just what he needs. In answering the objectors to his God in Christ he made copious use of historical materials in his proof-texting fashion. But he prepared for this use by reporting that although, as we have just seen, he had no interest in orthodoxy for orthodoxy's sake or in behalf of personal safety, he was not adverse to recognizing points at which the inherited faith seemed to him valid. On this he says,

"I have been examining relations to proper orthodoxy more carefully of late than I had done before and the result is a double surprise; in the discovery, first, that I am so much nearer to real orthodoxy than I supposed, and secondly that the New England theology, so called, is so much farther off.

"Indeed, I am ready, for once, to venture a prophecy . . . that when the smoke of this present commotion is blown away, and the noise of it is succeeded by the silence of reason, I shall be found, in the book you are examining, to stand in much better keeping with the orthodoxy of the Reformation, connected with the previous times, reaching back to the Nicene era, than do the teachers generally and the current opinions of New England."⁴

It is in this same spirit that we find him making the confession in his third book that since publishing his volume God in Christ he had found time to do some research in the history of dogma and much to his surprise and delight found himself in harmony with

¹Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 12.

²Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice, pp. 15 ff.

³Ibid., p. 28.

⁴Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 12.

the Nicene formula which embraced features which he regarded to be essential to a satisfactory doctrine of the Trinity.¹ Previously he had not "sufficiently conceived its import or the title it has to respect as a Christian document." Thus Bushnell thought, gained insight by intuitive flash, wrote and published while the ideas were hot and then studied history as a sort of afterthought only to learn, as is frequently the case, that the ancients have stolen our best thoughts.

But let us notice what is involved here from the point of view of the technique of a mediating theologian.

a) He does not arrive at his convictions by the pathway of historical study. He does not seek such aid to the discovery of what the Christian religion really is before he goes out to propagate it. Trusting the validity of his own findings gained in an earnest quest in the Eternal Now he stands before his contemporaries and asserts that his discoveries in the area of religion are at once rational and verifiable. His is a "reproducible experience." Thus he gains the ear and the confidence of the oncoming generation with its reaction against the deadening weight of the traditional.

b) But in the practical maelstrom of struggle for the survival of his insights in the practical life of the church, Bushnell discovered it to be advantageous to point out his continuity with historic Christianity. When properly evaluated the type of religion for which he is contending is in harmony with the accumulated experience of the church. He claims that historical perspective enables him to see that he belongs to the old school if you make the school old enough. This discovery of his essential similarity to ancient ecclesiastical teaching seems to have come as a shock and a revelation. We have in Bushnell then another example of a candidate for excommunication on the charge of heresy who makes an appeal for vindication not to the future but to the past as a witness to his essential orthodoxy.

As a matter of mediating ministry and of pedagogical technique, experience taught our theologian the value of this sense of continuity. For in the practical life of the social organism we call the church we do not start at scratch. And Bushnell was enough of a sociologist to recognize that while he was engaged in a fresh quest, a great deal of successful seeking had preceded him. Lifting to new levels from within the group involved for the mediator the maintenance of contact and continuity with the past. As a principle of religious pedagogy this mediator would

¹See pp. 103 ff. of the complete dissertation.

have agreed with the statement that "the original genius who begins everything from the foundation and presents a system of doctrine of which the church has never heard before, erects a castle of mist on a rock of cloud."¹

f. Bushnell as a pastor-theologian is an apologist rather than a philosopher of religion.

Bushnell is a church product. The complex forces which entered into his making we have investigated. We discovered that he was prepared for his function as a mediator first of all by influences exerted at home, where the children were led to feel that religion matters. This sort of family religion was derived from the church. At nineteen he identified himself with the church. He attended a church college where at least occasionally the claims of religion upon a student's attention were presented. Here he began a process of hammering out a personally achieved set of religious convictions. After a brief contact with the wide world in New York City we found him returning to New Haven and finally voting to spend his life professionally in the service of the church. For this ministry he prepared in a church maintained seminary where inevitably the purpose of perpetuating the values for which the church stands bulked large in the curriculum and in his own thought. After a brief period of insecurity and floundering he began his long pastorate as the leader of a church group. Here the practical demands of working with people of differing viewpoints necessitated his development of skills as a mediating interpreter of the Christian religion. The measure of success gained in his own parish brought him into prominence as an exponent of the message of the church in terms meaningful to both the older and the younger generation. As a pastor-theologian he is a product of the on-going life of the organized Christian movement. And in turn as a pastor-theologian he functions in the process by which the values carried by the social organism we call the church are transmitted from one age to another.

Bushnell maintains the position of an apologist for the truth of the Christian religion. With the aid of the Hebrew-Christian tradition, conserved and treasured by the organized church this gifted product of the church gained rich and meaningful religious insights which color for him and for all like minded the very significance of life itself. He stands within this

¹F. H. Foster, A Genetic History of the New England Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907), p. 408.

tradition using the organized church as an instrument for the increase, enrichment and preservation of these experiences of worth. He assumes the task of making the values which the church carries intelligible, attractive, and controlling in terms of his day and generation.

He found the key to the nature of reality in Jesus Christ and his task as a theologian was one of exposition of this insight in the light of the Holy Book of the church, illuminated by the accumulated dogma of the church, but made vital with the aid of concepts and patterns of thought which were axiomatic to his contemporaries. This whole endeavor was engaged in for the purpose of meeting a specific situation which had arisen in the history of New England Protestantism. The theologian we have been studying performs a function in the corporate life of the church in America by easing the tension between inherited traditions and the vitality of a new intellectual climate.

This is nowhere illustrated more clearly than in the record of his influence upon younger men. He aided a generation of such to give themselves to the furtherance of the purposes of the church and saved them from the necessity of becoming either "truthful traitors" or "loyal liars." As an example of this phase of his mediation we have the testimony of no less a figure in American Protestantism than Washington Gladden who pays this tribute to Bushnell:

"To tell the story of my indebtedness to this great friend would take more room than is left here, but I must say that I could not have remained in the ministry, an honest man, if it had not been for him. . . . If I had not found his 'God in Christ' and 'Christ in Theology' I must have stopped preaching. Dr. Bushnell gave me a moral theology and helped me to believe in the justice of God. If I have had any gospel to preach during the last thirty-five years it is because he led me into the light and joy of it."¹

Phillips Brooks addressed a sonnet to Dr. Bushnell in grateful recognition of the contribution made to the growth of the influential pulpiteer of Copley Square, Boston, and his biographer tells us that in Brooks' library no books showed signs of harder usage than Bushnell's Sermons for the New Life.²

¹Washington Gladden, "Reminiscences," quoted by Theodore T. Munger, Horace Bushnell, Preacher and Theologian (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1899), p. 375.

²A. V. G. Allen, The Life of Phillips Brooks (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1907), p. 66.

William Wallace Fenn, The Religious History of New England,

Perhaps it is not too much to say that if Bushnell had done nothing else than to have preserved for the church Washington Gladden and to have enriched the ministry of Phillips Brooks, his mediating ministry was not in vain. Certainly to subtract these two figures from the story of American Protestantism would leave huge vacancies against the sky. The facts are, however, that our pastor-theologian served by his mediation to welcome into the service of the church a generation of younger men who combined in their make-up both the desire to serve their fellow men through the instrumentality of the organized church and at the same time preserved a lively desire to think.

We have not been dealing, therefore, with a philosopher of religion. Bushnell is not a research man eager to confront the universe with the scientific tools of thought in order to find out what kind of a place the universe is before constructing a philosophy about it. He does not build an intellectually foolproof world view and then labor somehow to fit his religion into it. He does not have a passion for objectivity which makes him question his profoundest insights lest he impinge upon the universe his own wishful thinking. He starts with a church-mediated insight and builds a world view around it. In a sense then he is not primarily a seeker. He is a finder. He has made a discovery about the nature of reality in Jesus Christ. This flavor seasons for him the whole lump. He stands within the Christian tradition and as a theologian ministering in behalf of the group he seeks to make at home in the thought world of his day the contribution which his religious insights make, not only to a satisfactory intellectual Weltanschauung but to the business of living the life abundant.

Here is one of the places where the contrast between Emerson and Bushnell is apparent. The Seer of Concord is a hyper-individualist who withdraws from the organized church. He found the ritual of the organized group life of the church distasteful and meaningless to him personally and consequently of little

traces the influence of Coleridge upon Bushnell who in turn deeply influenced Phillips Brooks (Quoted by W. S. Archibald, Horace Bushnell [Connecticut: Edwin V. Mitchell, 1930], p. 53).

Allen, op. cit., p. 111: "He continued to read Bushnell, but remarks that he is not entirely in agreement with him."

W. W. Sweet, The Story of Religions in America (New York: Harper & Bros., 1930), p. 492: "The more widely acclaimed ministries of Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks were largely inspired by the essentials of Bushnell's message which through them reached Christian people of every section of the nation."

value. He failed to see that where two or three are gathered together in the right name there God is in the midst. Withdrawing from the group he sat alone. And equipped as he was with rare gifts he broadcasts by pen and lecture platform to America--a free lance, unhampered and unaided by an ecclesiastical organization to perpetuate his contribution. In marked contrast, Bushnell, who had been exposed to many of the influences which made Emerson, stays with the church and makes his contribution to progress by lifting from within the group. Through the instrumentality of the movement to which he belonged his ministry lived on and the influences which he set in motion are perpetuated in the social immortality which the Christian group in society possesses.

Bushnell demonstrates in his career the fate of the mediating thinker. He does his work and serves his day. He helps a generation of younger Christian leaders to make an intellectual adjustment which enables them to give their potentialities to the service of their kind through the Christian Church. Such a ministry has its sacrificial aspects. The Mediator is open to misunderstanding by the left and by the right. Not being a man of a party but between parties he stands alone often the butt of the jibes of both. But he mediates and in the very process is transcended. The movement which produced him and which he served moves on, enriched by his contribution but in fresh need of his ministry over again in the new day. The work of the mediator is never done. Bushnell demonstrates the validity of the word of Jesus, "He that findeth his life shall lose it and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."¹

¹ Matt. 10: 39.

